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# In case of accident

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In case of **Accident...**

The twelve-year-old was clearing the dining room table after dinner. My husband was lingering over coffee, talking to her and reading. I'd gone out in the family car to a college faculty meeting in the next city. Suddenly from the kitchen came a clatter, followed by a loud, ominous "Oh, boy!"

The carving knife had slipped from the platter and sliced deeply into my daughter's right forefinger where it joins her hand. She hurried to the sink to run cold water on it.

In one sickened glance, my husband realized that she was bleeding badly from a serious gash, which would need stitches, and that I'd taken the car. He stopped the flow of blood by pressing directly on the cut with a clean handkerchief and called a friend who drove them to the hospital. The resident in the emergency room closed the wound with six stitches.

My daughter considered the incident dramatic and unique. Actually she joined a staggering parade of statistics: one of 20 million persons who are injured every year in household accidents, and possibly one of the four million considered seriously hurt. Knives cause 100,000 of these injuries. Still, for all her pain and subsequent disability, the accident was less damaging than it might have been because everyone acted quickly and correctly in the sort of emergency that could happen in your home.

Given life's wry twists, you are likely to face accidents at inopportune times, such as now during the busy season for public accountants when the household routine is out of kilter anyway. The H&S member of the family will be working late and may have the car. The resident parent will be left to cope alone with the dozens of small crises that hit families and, perhaps, with a large emergency.

In random questioning around the Firm and elsewhere, *H&S Reports* has determined which accidents seem to happen most often; and from medical and safety experts, what to do in case of an accident. By reading this now, when the winds of crisis are calm, you will be prepared to deal with an emergency should it arise. Better yet, you might even prevent it.

First of all, you need to be prepared. By knowing what you should do, you will stave off the worst emergency of ail—panic. Because my daughter had the presence of mind to run cold water on her knife wound, she helped slow the bleeding. Because my husband found a clean handkerchief and applied direct pressure, he stopped the bleeding. Because my friend responded immediately and calmly, they all reached the hospital quickly and safely.

Review the fundamentals of first aid to be sure you remember how to stop serious bleeding, how to treat burns immediately, whether or not to induce vomiting in case of poisoning, how to deal with fractures, sprains and strains to prevent further injuries, what to do for a child who's choking. First-aid handbooks are available from bookstores, libraries, the Red Cross, the Boy Scouts. If you're really keen to learn more, or if your family is accident prone, you could take a first-aid course at the local Red Cross chapter or other service agency. Or encourage one of your children to seek a scouting merit badge in first aid.

Have a friend in need lined up ahead of time in case the family car is elsewhere or if you don't drive. It might be a good idea in any event to arrange an emergency procedure with someone nearby on whom you can rely—one of you to drive, one to tend to the injured person. But before the two of you dash off heroically to the nearest emergency room, be sure you're doing the right thing. If you have had a first-aid refresher course, you know some injured persons should be treated on the spot rather than being moved and then moved only by trained rescuers.

Find out if your community has a volunteer ambulance corps or rescue squad with equipment and staff to answer emergency calls. In some towns, the police provide ambulance service; in others, fire departments respond. Know what's available and be sure the number is on the emergency list posted next to your telephone. This list should have numbers for:

..... Fire Department  
..... Police  
..... Ambulance  
..... Doctor  
..... Poison Control Center

If you must make an emergency call, catch your breath before you dial. Then call. Tell where the emergency is, what has happened, what help is needed and who you are. It's faster to call directly for the emergency service you need; but if you don't have the number or if you must phone in the dark, dial the "O" for operator or 911 if that emergency number is in use in your area. (Ask the phone company.) Give the same details on what happened, where and who's calling.

**Y**ou will probably want to bring your children into the prepare-for-emergencies team as soon as you feel they are ready. Instruction on calling for help, application of a compress or use of the home fire extinguisher might well prove invaluable.

Although no one would suggest that you go about looking for accidents to happen, you know they easily may and you'll be better prepared to deal with them if you know where the trouble spots are. This removes some of the element of surprise, but, in the event of an emergency, you'll have enough drama to be able to spare the suspense.

#### THE KITCHEN:

With irritating perversity, the heart and nerve center of the home is also the most dangerous room in the house. Knives cut, stoves and toasters burn, cleaning products poison. But because the kitchen is so much a part of our daily routine, we treat it nonchalantly.

Consider an industrial job that required a worker to cut, chop and peel with sharp instruments; to tend an electric or gas fire and at the same time to mix, prepare or otherwise handle inflammable products; to lift hot, heavy containers; to use electrical appliances and running water, and to clean equipment with toxic materials. Union and management, as well as federal law, would insist that only trained, skilled workers perform the job, that they wear special clothes and safety glasses, and that no unauthorized personnel be allowed in the work area.

Yet housewives work in kitchens every day, often wearing loose, frilly clothes, endlessly distracted by children and the telephone. Others in the family use the kitchen casually.

Imposing industrial safety rules on your kitchen would make your home pretty dreary and kitchen work practically impossible. Observing a few fundamentals, though, would go a long way toward keeping your kitchen safe. Be aware of hazards (don't touch electrical appliances with wet hands), have common-sense work habits (use the right knife for the job you're doing and not for opening a stubborn jar) and pay attention while you're working (concentrate solely on removing the roast from the oven before answering the twelve-year-old who wants help with geometry).

### **STAIRS AND LANDINGS:**

The endless comedy routines of the harassed father being upended on a roller skate at the top of the stairs strike us as funny because humor works when it's based on truth. Cluttered, dim and broken stairs are truly hazards. The U.S. Consumer Products Safety Commission reported last year that 356,000 persons required hospital treatment for fractures and other injuries suffered in falls on stairs and landings at home.

If you don't use the stairs for storing toys and old magazines you plan to read sometime, your stairways will be considerably safer, as they will if you repair broken treads and frayed rugs right away, and if you don't use scatter rugs at the top and bottom. Neither should you try conserving energy by using a stingy light or none at all over stairs and landings.

### **BATHROOMS:**

The elusive soap in the tub or shower subverts us all at times. The presence of water and electricity, as in the kitchen, constitutes a hazard. Medicine in the cabinet and caustic chemicals under the sink are obviously dangerous.

You could eliminate much of the potential trouble by equipping the tub or shower with a support bar along the wall, by prohibiting a radio in the bathroom and by taking time to point out to anyone in the family who needs reminding that medicine and drain

cleaner are good when used as directed and poisonous when used any other way.

### **ALL AROUND THE HOUSE:**

A complete listing of all the potential household hazards would be a neurotic exercise, leaving everyone wondering if it were safe to get up in the morning.

**F**ires can start from unattended or malfunctioning fireplaces, from frayed cords on appliances and overloaded circuits and from cigarettes and careless smoking (the chief cause of house fires).

Equip your home with fire extinguishers. Baking soda will put out grease fires. Chemical or pressurized equipment should be approved by UL (Underwriters' Laboratories) or FM (Factory Mutual Laboratories). Some safety experts suggest keeping a garden hose under every sink in the house as an inexpensive piece of fire-fighting equipment. Active, fun-loving children might consider hoses an exciting alternative to pillow fights. In that case, the remedy would be nearly as bad as the ailment. Perhaps you should stick to actual extinguishers.

Have a fire escape plan for your house and make sure everyone knows what to do. Be sure your insurance is in line with today's replacement costs. Best of all, prevent fires.

Injuries can result from power tools, sharp implements, toys, firearms, glass. Use scissors with caution; keep firearms unloaded and locked; sweep up broken glass immediately. Common sense on the part of adults and reasonable discipline of children will avert trouble with items that can cut or maim. The old adage "when all else fails, read the directions," is the wrong way to approach the use of power equipment. Know what you are doing by reading the directions first.

If you've read this far without an accident, knock wood. Or maybe you shouldn't. You might get a splinter in your hand. On the other hand, if you were to live with constant worry like that, you'd be a nervous wreck. Dr. Benjamin Spock observed in one of the editions of *Baby and Child Care*: "Parents cannot prevent all accidents. If they were careful enough or worrisome enough, they would only make a child timid and dependent."

Reasonable care will make your house safe. Eliminate obvious hazards and reduce potential hazards. Prepare to deal calmly and capably with the rest. Keep a first-aid kit handy and well equipped. You'll have to check this regularly because bandages and tape disappear mysteriously in most households with children. Post a first-aid instruction sheet and poison antidote chart where you can refer to them quickly. Drug stores and pharmaceutical houses often give these away as advertising, or you can make your own by copying information from a first-aid handbook. Learn how to get to the emergency room of the nearest hospital.

Once you have the basic emergency equipment, the know-how to use it, a routine to follow in case of emergency and the will not to panic, relax. Such is the irony of daily life that if you have all these things, you probably won't need them. □



## STAIRS

- ▶ Insist they be kept free of litter by making everyone in the family responsible
- ▶ Repair broken stairs and railings; replace frayed carpeting; remove scatter rugs
- ▶ Keep them well-lighted.

## BATHROOM

- ▶ Add a support bar in the tub
- ▶ Use skid-resistant strips or mats in shower and tub
- ▶ Do not touch electrical fixtures if you are standing in water or if your body is wet
- ▶ Don't have a radio in the bathroom
- ▶ Remove old medicine; keep new medicine plainly marked.

## In Case of Accident

### EVERYWHERE

- ▶ Don't overload electric circuits
- ▶ Repair frayed appliance cords
- ▶ Use fireplace screens
- ▶ Don't run to answer the phone
- ▶ Unplug the iron when it's not being used
- ▶ Use power equipment according to directions
- ▶ Don't smoke in bed.

Suggested guides for more information:

- ▶ *Check List for Emergencies*, by Peter Arnold, Doubleday, \$1.95
- ▶ *Standard First Aid and Personal Safety*, American Red Cross, \$1.95
- ▶ *First Aid*, Boy Scouts of America, 45¢

### KITCHEN

- ▶ Turn pot handles to the side of the stove
- ▶ Store knives in slotted racks; keep them sharp; use the proper knife for the job
- ▶ Clean up spills to prevent falls
- ▶ Keep baking soda handy to put out grease fires; do not use water because it spreads grease fires
- ▶ Unplug the toaster before trying to remove bread that has been caught inside
- ▶ Dry your hands before using electrical appliances
- ▶ Keep poisonous substances in original containers with labels specifying contents and antidotes and out of reach of small children
- ▶ Don't mix different kinds of cleansing agents
- ▶ Treat your kitchen with the respect you'd give a complex machine shop and use it with the care of a skilled machine operator.